

mense vogue, of Erckmann-Chatrian's numerous productions.

Those so-called "Eomans Nationaux" hung well together,

thanks to a variety of connecting links; and in their

prodigious circulation Zola constantly had before his eyes an

example of the great success which might attend a series of

novels leading skilfully one from the other.

But he did not propose to write about the past, even the

near past, such as the First Republic and the First Empire,

which had supplied Erckmann-Chatrian with their thenoes ;

his aim was to describe contemporary manners, those of the

then-existing Second Empire. That *regime* had begun In

blood, and had passed through some remarkable phases,

which would provide him with suitable backgrounds for

several stories. And it followed — purely and simply as a

matter of course — that the series he contemplated must "be

largely a record of social and natural degeneration. The de-

generacy of the times was a stock subject, a commonplace

of contemporary literature. The playwrights—Ponsaird,

Augier, Feuillet, Barriere, Sardou, Dumas *fits*, and others, liad.

harped upon it for years. It had figured in numeroTTS

novels; it had formed the subject of many volumes of so-

called " serious " literature; it had appeared in the pages of

Tocqueville, it had found an echo amid even the hopefulness

of PreVost-Paradol's " France Nouvelle "; it was  
a theme  
repeatedly selected by those newspapers  
which did not  
pander to the supporters of the *demi-monde*. No  
don't) ~fc,  
there has never been a time, since men began to  
write, wh. en-  
some of them have not pictured the world and  
the hum.a.n.  
species as degenerate. The cry, *O ! tempora, O !  
mores*, lists  
re-echoed through all the centuries  
indiscriminately. 33-u.t  
under a *regime* so base and corrupt as the  
Second Frencti